

CO-CHAIRPERSONS: Senator Bye and Representative Walker

VICE CHAIRPERSONS: Senator Hartley, Representative Genga and Representative Porter

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Good morning, Senator Bye and Representative Walker, vice chairmen and all committee members. My name is Tanya Hughes. I'm the Executive Director for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about our agency's budget. With me today is our Deputy Director, Cheryl Sharp, as well as other key staff who will be available to answer any questions that you may have.

The midterm adjustments to the Commission's budget are of great concern to the agency. The changes will have a significant impact on the vital work of the country's oldest state based civil rights agency.

First, the budget seeks to postpone the set aside program for municipalities and quasi public agency's until 2019. Unfortunately, the program cannot be postponed because it is already up and running. The program is and will continue to protect the equal opportunity of the voters and tax payers of Connecticut – women, the disabled and those who are not in the majority race, color and national origin. The staff of the Contract Compliance unit has spent countless hours training municipalities and contractors regarding compliance with the statute. Filings have already begun to be submitted to the agency. Abruptly postponing the program would be costly to the contractors and the municipalities.

Second, the budget seeks to consolidate the Commission with the Office of Government Accountability ("OGA"). The budget removes all money from the Commission budget and consolidates it with OGA. The Commission is not a government watchdog agency like the other agencies that fall under OGA. Instead the Commission is an enforcement agency statutorily required to enforce the laws against employment discrimination in the private and public sector. Further the Commission enforces the fair housing act which protects citizen from being discriminated against in housing which is often provided by private landlords. Lastly, the Commission enforces the public accommodation statutes which again protect Connecticut residents from being discriminated against in both public and private settings.

The Commission relies heavily on contracts from the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission ("EEOC") and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD"). Moving the Agency to OGA would jeopardize \$1.7 million in federal funding to the Connecticut General Fund. That is 27% of the Commission's operating budget.

The Commission is agreeable to entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with OGA for Administrative Purposes Only ("OPA"). The Commission wants our full budget restored to our agency and we will in turn work diligently with OGA for our administrative needs.

Finally, the Commission seeks to maintain the current statutory requirement of each agency submitting an affirmative action plan. The federal requirements are not comprehensive and they fail to include all of Connecticut's protected classes, which there are many compared to federal protections. Further, the affirmative action goals are designed to be in parity with the state labor force, not the national labor market which is vastly different.

In conclusion, all of the purposed budgetary changes do not provide any cost savings to the taxpayers and voters of the state of Connecticut. If the goal is to achieve savings for Connecticut, it is not achieved through these changes to the Commission's budget.

Thank you we will be happy to take questions you have for us.